4: Wagley E-5 (1939-1940) 1943
SP22 Tapirape SP22

INTRODUCTION

The Tapirapé Indians are a Tupi-speaking tribe living in Central Brazil west of the Araguaya River. Their villages formerly extended some two hundred miles to the north of the Tapirapé River, an affluent of the Araguaya; but today their one remaining village lies west of the Araguaya, about forty miles north of the Tapirapé and 160 miles from the point of union of the two rivers. This settlement contains a total population that does not exceed 150 people, the residue of five villages that probably existed so late as the turn of the century and that are said to have had a population of about two hundred people each. A progressive population decline has followed the acquiring of diseases from contact with the neighboring Carajá Indians of the Araguaya River and from European visitors. Such contacts, however, have left their aboriginal culture little changed.

The Tapirapé are properly a forest people, maintaining an agricultural life on clearings hewed from the great tropical forest. Their cultivated fields are large producing manioc (both *Manihot manihot* and the sweet species *Manihot palmata aypi*), maize, pumpkins, beans, peppers, yams, kará (*Dioscorea sp.*), cotton, and bananas.

The dry months of June through September of each year are devoted to clearing the garden sites. This work is done by men, frequently working individually, sometimes in communal labor formed by the men's moiety groups (1). When the clearing is done collectively, the large field is divided into individual plots which become individual property;

(1) There is an excellent description of this communal activity, called *apatxirn* by the Tapirapé in Herbert Baldus. 1937. "Os grupos de comer e os grupos de trabalho dos Tapirapé", *in Ensaios de Etnologia Brasileira*, pp. 98-111, São Paulo.

[p.61]
[p.60 blank]

241 462 [423] and planting, which begins after the first light rains of October, is done individually and principally by the men. Cotton and peanuts, however, are women's crops. The women plant these in their husband's garden plots and harvest them themselves. While a new garden plot is cleared each year, a particular garden plot is generally used for two years and then abandoned. A man plants such crop as maize, beans, and peppers on the plot the first year and as they are harvested, he replants the plot with manioc. Maize is harvested from the end of December through February, the season of heaviest rains; while other crops are harvested at the end of the rains in May and June.

[241] 262 22 Large gardens with many different crops guarantee to the Tapirapé a variety and abundance of garden stuff, but meat and fish are definitely luxuries. People in the village could not remember a time when there had been real hunger among them, but they were frequently hungry for meat and fish. This lack in the diet is supplied by frequent trips to the near-by Tapirapé River and the grass plains that border it where fish and game, principally wild pork (*Tagassu pecari*), deer, peccary (*Tagassu tajacu*), water fowl, and tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*) are found in abundance. During the dry season these plains abound in piqui (*Caryocar villosum*), palm nuts especially andiroba (*Carapa guyanensis*), used for body oil — and other wild fruits.

556 435 Among the Tapirapé wealth is not reckoned in terms of basic subsistance, for these goods are so easy to obtain as to be considered with little regard. The possessions that lend real distinction of wealth are such luxury articles as the breast and tail feathers of the red parrot (*Ara chloroptera?*), beads, and pieces of hardware acquired through contact with white men or trading with other Indians. These goods are accordingly the most valued media of exchange in the community. Other goods used for a medium of exchange were urucú (*Bixa orellana*), tobacco, extra hammocks, decorated gourds, string for binding feathers to arrows, and cane arrow shafts.

361 The houses of a Tapirapé village form a circle around a great central ceremonial men's house. There are nine of these large thatch dwellings with rounded roofs in the modern Tapirapé village; four to eight simple families (father, mother, and children) share a house. Each simple family has a section of the unpartitioned house where they lead a domestic life separate from the others. Residence is matrilocal and the women of such a household are ideally related by kinship; yet each large household has

591 592

4: Wagley E-5 (1939-1940) 1943
SP22 Tapirape SP22

when an
individual discovers a new patch of tobacco, he hastily builds a low 276
fence around it to inform others that it belongs to him. This native [423]
tabacco is smoked by laymen in short tubular pipes made of wood or
clay and by shamans in long clay pipes, sometimes 30 centimeters long.

Tobacco is used for leisure-time smoking for pleasure: but its [517]
principal uses among the Tapirapé are as a stimulant and as a medicine. [278]
Each night after a long day's work or while traveling or hunting, Tapi-
rapé men blow smoke over their tired legs, arms, and backs and some-
times men can be seen fumigating their tired wives or companions.
They accompany the fumigation of their bodies with massage, rubbing
their arms and legs toward the extremities. Tiredness and soreness are [753
considered extraneous substances acquired during the day through exer- 827]
cise and it is believed they may be massaged and fumigated from the
body.

Treatment of the sick is the shaman's most common duty and the 755
use of tobacco is always a necessáry prelude and accompaniment to [276]
this. Unless the illness is serious enough to warrant imimediate treat-
ment, shamans always cure in the late evening. A shaman comes to
his patient, and squats near the patient's hammock, his first act is always
to light his pipe. When the patient has a fever or has fallen uncon-
scious from the sight of a ghost, the principal method of treatment is
by massage. The shaman blows smoke over the entire body of the
patient; then he blows smoke over his own hands, spits into them, and
massages the patient slowly and firmly, always toward the extremities
of the body. He shows that he is removing a foreign substance by a
quick movement of his hands as he reaches the end of an arm or leg.

The more frequent method of curing, however, is by the extraction
of a malignant object (18) by sucking. The shaman squats alongside
the hammock of his patient and begins to "eat smoke" — swallow large
gulps of tobacco smoke from his pipe. He forces the smoke with great
intakes of breath deep down into his stomach; soon he becomes intoxicated and nauseated; he vomits violently and smoke spews from his
stomach. He groans and clears his throat in the manner of a person
gagging with nausea but unable to vomit. By sucking back what he
vomits he accumulates saliva in his mouth (19).

(18) Fishbones, worms, arrows which are injected into body by sorcery. [754]

(19) It hardly need be said that *paniê* do not eat before curing in this manner, but prefer to cure with an empty stomach.

121 Wagley & Galvão E-5 (1939-1940)1948
SP22 Tapirape SP22

CULTURE

SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

137 The region inhabited by the *Tapirapé* is one of dense tropical forest; yet near the Tapirapé River and parallel to its small tributaries, there are great strips of semiarid savanna country characterized by scrub growth 133 and groups of buriti palms. These plains are flooded during the excessive 132 rains from October to April, and they are arid during the latter part of the dry season (May through September).

Farming.—The *Tapirapé* make great clearings in the forest for their 241 villages, traveling occasionally to the savanna country for hunting. Their [484] large gardens guarantee them an economy of abundance. They plant several varieties of both sweet and poisonous manioc, four varieties of maize, pumpkins, beans, peppers, cará (*Dioscorea* sp.) and yams, peanuts, squash, several varieties of bananas and beans, cotton, and papaya.

[221] Each year, from June to September, the men clear away the forest for their gardens. Clearing is frequently done individually; frequently also 241 it is done cooperatively by the men's ceremonial moiety groups in a work 616 festival (apačirú). When communally prepared, the large clearings are 476 afterward divided into individual garden lots. Gardens are, thus, gener- [423] ally individual property; now and again, however, a younger man plants together with an older man (his father-in-law) or a close relative. When clearing is done by apačirú, plots are allocated for ceremonial moiety leaders, who use the produce during the harvest feast (kaô) at the end 241 of the rainy season. Vegetation and tree trunks, cut down during the dry season and left to dry, are burned in September. Just after the first rains of October, planting is begun. All crops are planted without order or division within the garden plot, and weeds are never cleared away as [462] the garden grows. All gardening is done by men except the planting and harvesting of peanuts and cotton, which is done entirely by women.

Harvest takes place as the various crops ripen. Maize planted in late October or early November ripens in January; in April and May squash, cará, beans, etc. begin to ripen. Manioc is harvested as needed throughout [422] the year. All food from the gardens is said to belong to the wife once it is brought into the house.

Garden plots are planted for 2 years and then abandoned. The second year only manioc is generally planted in the plot. Yet each year a new plot is cleared from virgin forest and thus each gardener has generally two current garden plots—one newly cleared and a second-year plot planted [361] with manioc. The lack of virgin forest on high ground for garden clearings within accessible distance to the village, as well as the fear of the spirits of recent dead, force the *Tapirapé* to move their village site each 4 or 5 years to a new site.

262 Manioc is by far the most important *Tapirapé* crop, as manioc flour is 252 the basis of their diet. Different from other *Tupí* groups, however, the

12: Wagley & Galvão E-5 (1939-1940) 1948
SP22 Tapirapé SP22

Tapirapé do not use the tipiti (the long woven tube in which the water is squeezed from poisonous manioc), but squeeze poisonous manioc with their hands. The pulp is then spread out on a platform in the sun to be thoroughly dried. The flour is toasted in a clay pot over a very hot fire. 252

Wild foods.—Meat is a definite luxury to the agricultural *Tapirapé*. Monkeys, armadillos, forest fowls, cuati (*Nasua* sp.), and both kinds of peccary (*Tayassus tajacu* and *T. pecari*) are occasionally killed in the forest at any time during the year. The hunting and fishing season, however, is from June through October, when the savanna country is dry. The savannas are extraordinarily rich with game. Plains deer, wild pigs, peccary, and wild duck, and geese near the drying swamps are plentiful. 224 [221]

Fish are shot with the bow and arrow and stupefied with timbó (*Paullinea pinnata* or *Serjania* sp.) in the almost dry streams and lakes. The village is almost deserted in September and October, after garden sites have been cleared and before planting. Men, women, and children move out to the plains country near the Tapirapé River and set up a temporary camp. They collect turtle eggs and kill turtles in the river. They gather piqui fruit (*Caryocar vellosum*), andiroba (*Carapa guyanensis*), and other wild fruits, and, from October through November, they find wild honey both on the savanna and in the forest. 226 221 222

Hunting is done with the bow and arrow, but a club is used to finish the kill, especially wild pigs or jaguars. [224]

HOUSES AND VILLAGES

The houses of a *Tapirapé* village form an oval around a large ceremonial men's house (tākana), which is forbidden to the women. Both the large men's house, approximately 20 by 65 feet (6 by 20 m.), and the residential houses, averaging 13 by 33 feet (4 by 10 m.), have a quadrangular floor plan with arched roofs made by bending flexible poles and tying them together over a roof beam (pl. 19, *bottom, left*). The walls and the roof are covered with leaves of buriti palm and wild banana. 361 342 345

In the surviving village, called Tampitawa, there were nine residential houses, each housing from four to eight simple families. Each family occupies a determined sector of the house where they cook, keep their belongings, and hang their sleeping hammocks. Household utensils, such as baskets, pots, hammocks, and gourds, are owned by the women of each simple family. Houses, though built by men, are said to be the property of the women of the house. The house frame is constructed cooperatively by all the men of the house. Each man covers the portion to be used by his wife and children. 592 422 [423] 342

Ideally, residence is matrilocal, and the house is inhabited by a group of closely related women and their husbands. The household leader is generally the husband of the oldest woman of the group (see p. 172). Owing perhaps to great depopulation and the accumulation of refugees [591] 592

12: Wagley & Galvão E-5 (1939-1940) 1948
SP22 Tapirapé SP22

Weapons.—Bows have a circular cross section and average about 6 feet (2 m.) in length. The arrows are of cane about 5 feet (1.6 m.) long with heads of bone, hardwood, and the spur from the sting ray (*Potamotygon histrix*). They have brilliant feathers, sometimes the red and blue feathers of the red macaw. Clubs are made of several polished hardwoods and are sometimes decorated near the handles with woven strands of cane fibers. 411

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Three distinct social groupings are basic in *Tapirapé* social organization: men's ceremonial moieties, feast societies, and the kinship groups. 561

Ceremonial moieties.—All *Tapirapé* men belong to one of the patrilineal ceremonial moieties. Each of these moieties is further divided into three age grades. There are consequently two groups of youths (those up to 15 years of age); two groups of men of warrior age (15 to 40 years); and two groups of older men (40 to 60 years). Each group bears the name of a bird, the word "wīrā" (bird) being the generic name for the group. These age groups (Baldus, 1937, p. 96, calls them "work groups") function as units in hunting and in clearing garden sites at the cooperative work festival; parallel groups also dance against each other in various ceremonials and reciprocally feast each other. Each moiety owns half of the men's house, and its portion is subdivided into sections owned by the three age grades. The warrior age group of each moiety has a "walking leader" for hunting excursions and communal work, and a "singing leader" for ceremonials. As a man becomes elderly, he entirely drops out of the "bird" groups and is no longer affiliated, as he cannot take part in their economic and ceremonial activities. At present, the *Tapirapé* are so reduced in number that, lacking older men, younger men pass prematurely into the older men's age grade in order to retain the necessary balance for ceremonials. 616 [345] [423]

Feast groups.—Both men and women are divided into eight feasting groups called tātáupawā (literally, "fire all to eat") Men belong to their fathers' feast group and women to their mothers'. Feast groups are not only nonexogamic, but people prefer to marry within their own group so that husband and wife may attend feasts together. These groups carry the names of the mythological heads of the original eight households of the first *Tapirapé* village. They unite at various times throughout the year for ceremonial meals. The feasts take place at traditional spots in the village plaza, at times when there is an abundance of honey, maize, or meat from the hunt. Each member brings his contribution. Baldus (1937, p. 88) calls these "eating groups," and emphasizes that they are consumers' groups providing a means of distributing food when more is available than a family can eat. Today only six groups meet for feasts, two being extinct for lack of members. 574 264 [582]

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12: Wagley & Galvão E-5 (1939-1940)1948
SP22 Tapirape SP22

by laymen in short tubular wooden or clay pipes and by shamans, in tubular clay pipes, sometimes 12 inches (30 cm.) long.

The *Tapirapé* do not routinely plant tobacco as other crops. Occasionally, it is transplanted from scattered patches around the gardens and village to near the houses or gardens, but usually the patches merely seed themselves. A person who discovers a new patch, hastily surrounds it with a low fence to show his ownership of it.

No alcoholic beverages are known to the *Tapirapé*. Beverages made from manioc and maize are prepared as a food and are not allowed to ferment.

RELIGION

Tapirapé religion is based on the belief in two kinds of supernatural beings—disembodied souls of the dead, and malignant forest spirits of many kinds—both designated by one generic term, ančunga (spirit or shadow).

The ančunga iünwera, human spirits or ghosts (aña or anhanga among the *Tupinamba*), live in abandoned villages and frequently come near to the villages of the living "because they are cold" and try to warm themselves close to the houses. The *Tapirapé* are afraid of meeting them and try not to go out at night, when the ghosts most frequently appear.

Souls of the dead continue to live for an undetermined period of time, then die and are transformed into animals. Anyone who hears the croak of a kururú frog (*Pipa pipa*) knows that it is the soul of a leader. A pigeon is the soul of a common man; a paca, that of a woman. The souls of the shamans have a different fate; they go to join Thunder.

In addition to the souls of the dead, there is a large number of malignant beings, also called ančunga, who dwell in the forest. They are very dangerous and kill as many *Tapirapé* as they find. Waré, a legendary hero and a great shaman, had the distinction of killing many ančunga, among whom were the awakú anká, by setting their long coarse hair on fire. The mumpianká were beings who killed men in order to drink their blood. Some of these forest spirits have become domesticated by the *Tapirapé*, thanks to the powers of their shamans. Several times the *Tapirapé* men dance with masks representing the visiting spirits (pl. 19, *bottom, right*).

Rites.—The real ceremonial season is the rainy season, when the people are thrown together because they can neither farm nor hunt. Mask dances celebrate the visits of the various spirits (ančunga) to the men's house during the dry season. At the end of the rainy season the harvest ceremonial (kaô) and the ceremony of kawi (a souplike beverage made of sweet manioc or of maize) are held.

In the first few months of the rainy season, when the maize crop is threatened by electrical storms and by the first heavy rains, the shamans